ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

December 1993

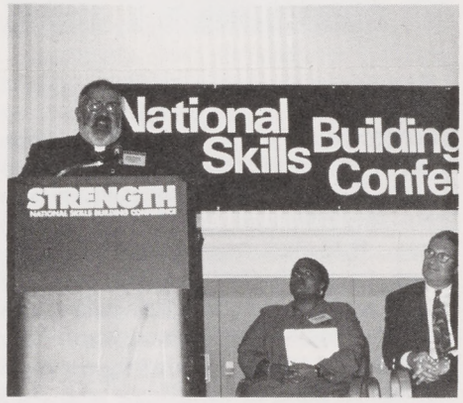
Troy Perry Keynotes National Skills Building Conference

Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, Founder and Moderator of UFMCC, was one of three keynote speakers at the AIDS National Interfaith Network plenary luncheon of the annual U.S. National Skills Building Conference. Over 1,200 activists, caregivers, and persons with HIV/AIDS attended from all over the U.S., Canada, and several other countries, including India and South Africa.

Perry spoke about UFMCC's experiences with AIDS in a speech which thrilled Conference participants. "His charismatic style and emotional presentation of the lessons UFMCC has learned really gave me the strength to go home and carry on my work!" enthused one conferee. Perry followed Rabbi Joseph Allen Edelheit, Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel in Minneapolis, MN, and Leon M. West, the Director of the National Anti-Drug Campaign, where he works to influence the Black Churches and their clergy to combat the epidemics of HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

Well over 100 MCCer's attended the conference, which this year was held in New Orleans, LA, October 31 - November 2. Rev. Steve Pieters led a well-attended workshop on creating a "Spiritual Strength for Survival" support group, and led a morning prayer service. Mr. Ravi Verma and Rev. Elder Don Eastman also attended the conference from Fellowship Headquarters.

Mr. Verma commented, "I've never seen such a gathering of people of colors, religious people, and people living with HIV/AIDS. It's an ideal space for MCCer's to do networking as well as skills building!" ▼



Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry

"With Strength To Carry On:" National Skills Building Conference Report

By Ms. Jane Rogers, AIDS/Health Ministries Coordinator of the South Central District of UFMCC

The National Skills Building Conference is the premier national meeting for front line AIDS workers in the United States. The conference is the leading mechanism for community-based organizations serving communities living with HIV to improve management skills and develop strategies to cope with issues pertinent to their growth, efficiency and effectiveness. It is the largest gathering of AIDS workers in the country. Sponsored through a unique partnership between the AIDS National Interfaith Network (ANIN), National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA), and National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC), the annual conference was held in New Orleans October 31-November 3, 1993.

THE CONFERENCE IN REVIEW

The theme of the 1993 National Skills Building Conference, "With Strength to Carry On," was chosen to emphasize the need to come together, re-energizing commitments, refocus thoughts, replenish skills and support one another on the front lines of the fight against AIDS. More than 120 courses and seminars were offered to address professional, personal, and spiritual needs. Highlights of the 1993 conference included introduction of a delegation of ten representatives from the Republic of South Africa who will put together a plan which will endure to save South Africa from the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has killed more than one-third of the population of many African countries; a program on the "Religious Response to AIDS" in which Rev. Elder Troy Perry of UFMCC, Rabbi Joseph Allen Edelheit, and Mr. Leon West addressed the contributions which religious organizations in America have made in the care of HIV/AIDS infected persons; "The Government's Response to AIDS" featured Kristine M. Gebbie, RN, MN, National AIDS Policy Coordinator, who discussed the need to stop denial about the impact of AIDS in all aspects of society, the need for AIDS and sex education and the need to focus on caring for those infected with HIV/AIDS.

IMPRESSIONS

As a participant in this 1993 National Skills Building Conference, I came away with three major impressions. First, the magnitude and impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic with 1.5 million people with HIV, 255,000 diagnosed with AIDS, and

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Breaking The Ice In East Texas

By Rev. Elder Willem Hein

Rev. Mary Hinsey and spouse, Jan

Longview, Texas is barely noticeable on the map, to a foreigner to the United States. It is a pleasant place set among the rolling hills and pine forests of East Texas. It is also, from what I saw and heard, in a substantial portion of the Bible belt, and as redneck as a number of similar regional cities and towns the world over.

Not much publicity occurs nationally around AIDS work in Longview, Texas, but things are done quietly, passionately, and with a deep sense of determination, to break the ice around this virus and its effect in this community.

The pastor of MCC With A Vision, Rev. Mary Hinsey, is also a registered nurse, donating time and effort, along with her spouse Jan, and members, to volunteer work with people with HIV/AIDS. Through the auspices of the South Central District, a "revival rider" tour brought me to Longview recently, and in one afternoon I learned more about AIDS care here, than I would in some large cities.

Serving some 14 countries, the services provided are often stretched to the limit, and volunteers are an essential part of care. Talking with Mary, I was shown around a clinic where free time is given by health professionals. Then it was off to the Nutrition Center with a member, and I was drafted into unloading a van full of canned and dry goods for the food bank. This was part of AIDS Help, an often on-the-edge-of-funds program where each dollar is stretched to make two, in order to provide food and care. In the middle of my discussions with the director there were calls about flying in stars for a fundraiser. Here too, raising community awareness beyond theological judgement, is important. Here too, the "phenomenal" rise in women with HIV causes deep concern, and in this "countrified" region of Texas, sharp rises in statistics indicate that the message of safe sex still has a long way to penetrate. In addition, discussions indicate that no longer does everyone move to the big cities where the virus manifests.

My last stop was Boyd House, a hive of activity with care, caseworkers, and constant interaction between a number of critical services. A safe space for care, rest, education, and some laughter. The joy of seeing people react in wellness, the pain of a death last night, the frustration of an appointment not kept by a client. And in the middle of it life goes on, people are persuaded that

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UFMCC Team Walks For AIDS

By Cheri Metier

On the cool overcast morning of Sunday, September 19, 1993, thousands of people left the warmth and comfort of their beds in exchange for a t-shirt and sneakers in order to participate in the AIDS Walkathon in Los Angeles.

Among these dedicated people were a very proud contingent of MCCer's. These thirteen walked as a team under the auspices of Divine Redeemer MCC in Glendale. Several other MCC's were represented including MCC of the Pomona Valley, MCC Long Beach, and MCC Los Angeles. While registration was coming to an end, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson led the team in prayer, worship, and communion.

The walkers collected pledges before the walk which will benefit AIDS Project Los Angeles in their continued fight to enable and promote the finding of a cure for HIV/AIDS and to assist those living with this virus. With this on their minds and in their hearts, the walk was hardly a challenge to these committed MCC people.

The last stretch of the 10-kilometer walk was hotter and seemed to be longer than the first, but the only price these walkers paid were some sweaty t-shirts, one sprained ankle, and of course, the sorrowful hearts of those of us who have loved and lost friends and family to this dreadful disease called AIDS. This day brings to mind the encouraging words of Paul in Philippians 4:13, "I (we) can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me (us)."

This team event, coordinated by Michelle Montoya of Divine Redeemer MCC, collected $1850 for AIDS Project Los Angeles. ▼

"With Strength to Carry On"

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172,000 deaths is overcome only by the heroic efforts of 3,000 AIDS ministries, thousands of full-service funded AIDS organizations, and hundreds of thousands of volunteers in response to the epidemic. We have truly come a long way in the numbers of us fighting this disease and the impact we have had on business and government. During the last nine years I have found myself among a basically volunteer core at AIDS conferences, most of whom operated on few donated dollars. At this conference, however, I found myself among paid staff who talked of budgets in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This reality was very "enlightening" and a confirmation of my reality - which was that the AIDS pandemic is way beyond a volunteer approach. Unfortunately, the volunteer approach was necessary for too many years. The care, concern, organization, "activism" and lobbying efforts of the gay and lesbian community since the beginning of the epidemic have begun to pay off as witnessed by the fact that many conference participants were staff members of AIDS organizations funded through government funds and private grants which we, the early volunteers, fought for in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

The second impression is the extent to which we, the AIDS community, appear complacent about and have no expectation about real change in or help from the U.S. government in AIDS public policy. Or maybe we were just in shock over

Building Bridges in Hispanic Communities Through HIV/AIDS Ministry

Rev. Jose Marcos Gonzalez was the only Latino clergyperson to testify at recent hearings on HIV/AIDS in the Latino community in Los Angeles. Rev. Gonzalez, the pastor of the Latino Ministry of MCC Los Angeles, reports that the organizers of the hearings called all the Latino churches they could find in the phone book. Many churches never returned the call, and those who did declined the invitation to testify. Rev. Gonzalez feels this is a reflection of the denial about HIV/AIDS that exists in the Latino community at large. "They don't want to talk about sexuality, because of cultural problems, but it's more complicated than that. They've made the association of AIDS with the gay community and there's a fear of talking about that. They say they don't know anyone in their congregations with HIV/AIDS, but they're already there."

There are 35-40 people in Rev. Gonzalez' congregation. He estimates that 60% are HIV-infected. He has had five deaths in his church over the last year. "I teach in sermons, and tell people on any occasion about AIDS education. For 1994, our main goal is AIDS education."

Rev. Jose Marcos Gonzalez

The hearings were organized by the Alianza Latino Caucus of the Los Angeles HIV Health Services Planning Council, and represented the first such meeting in Los Angeles history.

Gonzalez joined Assemblymembers Richard Polanco and Martha Escutia, Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, City Councilman Richard Alarcon, and State Senator Art Torres on a panel of invited speakers prior to the open public testimony.

Rev. Gonzalez testified that as a clergyperson he has a responsibility to educate his community: not just the gay/lesbian community, but the entire Hispanic community. He demanded more resources for people living with HIV/AIDS as well as good education programs targeting the Latino community. He also talked about the large number of Latina women and children in South Central Los Angeles who are dying from lack of attention and resources.

Currently, Rev. Gonzalez is building bridges within the Hispanic community around the issue of HIV/AIDS. He has met with *Cara a Cara, Lesbianas Latinas Unidas*, and the Spiritual Advisory Committee of AIDS Project Los Angeles, trying to work out a good relationship with all of them. "Always we're going to need to work together. We put the people first." Jose tells the story of working with a Mexican family whose son died from complications of HIV last month. Now that the family is back in Mexico City, they have asked Jose to be their "son" now. They have also asked for information about MCC in Mexico City, because they want to educate other

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"With Strength to Carry On"

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the presentation given by Ms. Kristine Gebbie in the Government Response to AIDS plenary! I had an expectation of hearing an address by the new AIDS Czar which addressed something. What we got was knowledge we have had for 12 years - the U.S. public policy denied the extent of AIDS, does not support AIDS and sex education in schools, and still does not fully fund AIDS care despite the Ryan White Care Act. After Ms. Gebbie's address, an HIV-positive woman in the audience stood up, shouted and demanded to know what the U.S. government's plans were to try to save her life and the life of others. She stated, "We have questions for you - when can we ask them?" The coordinator of the session stood up and stated that the session was an address and not a press conference. The audience of the major AIDS "activists" in the U.S. sat there silently. We all took hands, listened to a song which made people cry and adjourned. I just hope that as the "activists" in AIDS move from the volunteer to paid positions, we do not look at the effort as a business, go to conferences and act in such an "appropriate" manner that we forget that our "business" still is to demand, speak up and ACT-UP if necessary to find a cure for AIDS and take care of our brothers and sisters. We fought for these funds so that some of us could do our "business" full time and make a living at the same time!

The third impression I have is the vision of the broad-based, diverse, multicultural, and racial representation in attendance at this conference. I have never witnessed a professional or church conference with such broad-based representation of people of colors, ethnic background and lifestyle. This is as the world should be given the non-discriminatory nature of HIV. I remember when no person of color attended AIDS seminars. And, I remember 1988 when Dr. Mervyn Silverman, President of the American Foundation for AIDS Research challenged the gay community with a question of whether or not we would, as "owners of the AIDS organizations" serve the non-gay community as the virus spread into other populations. I knew the answer was a clear "YES," as MCC's were already ministering to the gay and straight community as well as women, men and children of all colors. The vision of diversity was apparent in the meeting halls at this conference, but, I think, it was even more poignant, at a reception and party sponsored by Broadway Cares/DIFFA on Monday night of the conference. I looked out on the dance floor and there we all were - gay, straight, black, white, brown, young, old - dancing together to the sounds of a New Orleans jazz band. This vision was truly of the rainbow and long overdue in this epidemic and in this world! ▼

Rev. LaPaula Turner Pastors Victory Ministries

Rev. LaPaula Turner is serving as the Pastor of Victory Ministries, a Special Work of UFMCC's Southwest District. Victory Ministries sends out street teams to educate people in the African-American and Latino communities of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, (California), about HIV/AIDS. Two teams of four persons talk to people on the streets about prevention, intervention, food, and housing for persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Rev. Turner became involved after she had met a singing group called Voices of Victory, first at MCC of the Pomona Valley, and then at a Samaritan Orientation program. They told her about their street ministry for HIV/AIDS prevention, called the Minority AIDS Service and Education (MASE). When LaPaula was brought on as pastor of the group, her responsibilities included teaching about homosexuality and the Bible, the practics of Christianity, and offering spiritual replenishment to the team members.

LaPaula is quick to point out that in talking to people in the street about Christian salvation and God's love, "the best way to show them is to provide for their needs." The teams pass out condoms and bleach, and they direct persons in need to available food and shelter. Turner reports that the San Bernardino American Red Cross has helped with office space, receiving calls, and securing condoms and bleach. The Executive Director of MASE, Aynn Terrell has been trained to do screening and testing for HIV. "Funding is an uphill battle," says Rev. Turner. "We've found angry people who aren't getting what they need. There's poor access to services, and a lot of racism. The funding goes to the white agencies, which already have plenty of funding. There are a lot of HIV-positive people of colors homeless on the streets." The Red Cross has given them over $100,000 over two years to run their program.

In 1992, Victory Ministries held the First Annual African-American AIDS Awareness Festival in San Bernardino. Over 200 people participated, and the event was reported in the San Bernardino Sun. A majority of the black churches in the area participated. The Festival in 1993 featured seven-year-old rappers, who were a huge success in getting the message across about HIV/AIDS.

LaPaula says, "Part of our challenge is to get into the black churches. Many of the black clergy would rather talk about homosexuality and sin. They're largely in denial: they will say someone died of pneumonia or cancer rather than AIDS. A black pastor from an AME church is helping to make inroads."

In the last year, the teams have interacted with over 2,000 persons, educating them about HIV/AIDS and breast cancer. They have tested over 1,500 for HIV. "We have 28 teenagers trained to do peer education, with 48 hours of training classes conducted by Aynn Terrell. They talk to kids in the schools," reports Rev. Turner. "The challenge now is to get more people trained for street ministry."

Rev. Turner reports that MCC has been supportive of Victory Ministries in several ways. In addition to becoming a Special Work of the Southwest District in 1991, the District has also stepped in to pay the rent when it was necessary.

Rev. Turner told ALERT, "It would be good to network with other MCC ministry groups so we could be supportive of each other. Networking is very important." If you are interested in further information or in networking, you may contact Victory Ministries at (909) 686-7119. ▼

Building Bridges...

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families about what they've been through with AIDS.

Rev. Gonzalez has made great use of Fellowship resources which have been translated into Spanish. "I did a Spanish Spiritual Strength for Survival Support Group with Troy Fernandez at the Fellowship offices. Sometimes it's difficult to make the connection between daily life with HIV/AIDS and the Scriptures. The pamphlet has helped, and sometimes I use the pamphlet to preach and to do education in the community."

When members of his congregation are preparing to die, Rev. Gonzalez helps them focus on the Resurrection. "When I have to prepare someone to die, we read the Bible and talk. I give readings about hope, emphasizing that you are not alone. God is with you right now. When they are very close, I ask them, "Now that you will be one with God, can you take care of me?" I know they are with the Communion of Saints, so I know they are walking with me and taking care of me. The most beautiful gift God has given me this year is to be close to people who are about to die. I have to be ready for my own death, and this ministry is helping."

AIDS ministry is a complex ministry in Rev. Gonzalez' eyes. Part of his job is to fight the bureaucracies. Part of his job is to speak and advocate for those who can no longer speak for themselves. "I have a lot to do in AIDS ministry, and I try to put my attention on what Jesus would do in my place."

The statistics in the Latino community are frightening: one in every three persons in Los Angeles County diagnosed with AIDS in 1992 was Latino/Latina. Latino AIDS cases increased 95% in 1991 over the previous five years. Latina AIDS cases increased 168% in 1991 over the previous five years. The largest group of children with HIV in Los Angeles County is Latino, with 41% of all the pediatric cases. The hearings focused attention on this problem, and will generate a policy paper which will create a blue print for action within the Latino community. ▼

Breaking The Ice...

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AIDS is not God's judgement, that care and compassion are necessary, that love is still an essential part of being.

For 14 counties in East Texas, breaking the ice of prejudice may not always be easy. But the people providing the services, and hundreds of others who are clients and carers, know the work must go on. This too is part of bringing God's realm on earth. They may not all know it, but they are active participants in doing so.